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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000624

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2023

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: MORE TOUGH TALK FROM PUTIN ON GEORGIA,  
EVEN MORE SWEETENERS ON ENERGY

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (C) Summary. Russian PM Putin told Bulgarian PM Stanishev that Russian forces would complete their withdrawal from Georgia proper following the deployment of an EU observer mission in early October. At the same time, the intensity of Putin's rhetoric and the depth of his emotion toward Saakashvili suggest a continuing hard line. Putin also committed to provide additional gas supplies to Bulgaria in 2010, and to attend a regional energy summit which will be hosted in Sofia in Spring 2009. End Summary.

[12.](#) (C) Meeting in Sochi to discuss contracts for Olympic infrastructure, Stanishev says he pressed Putin for a more moderate line on Georgia. While Putin reiterated his intention to carry through with Medvedev's September 8 commitment to remove Russian forces from Georgia proper following the arrival of EU observers, Putin did not provide specifics or elaborate on his intentions for expanded security zones around Abkhazia and Ossetia. Putin's harsh language and extreme antipathy toward Saakashvili were unabated and indicated that Russian policy would not move quickly in the direction of moderation.

[13.](#) (C) Stanishev raised with Putin the idea of establishing a group of wise men, or private experts, to look at the issue of separatism through Europe and the FSU and try to reach some common understandings. According to Stanishev, Putin was intrigued by the proposal and willing to engage further.

[14.](#) (C) Energy was also a key topic for the 90 minute meeting. Putin pressed for quick steps on South Stream, a process which Stanishev described as continuing Russian blackmail. He also promised to cover the sizeable increase in Bulgaria's gas needs in the 2010-2011 timeframe, which arise in part from the expectation that Azerbaijan will not fulfill its commitment for gas supplies to Bulgaria. Playing up Bulgaria's desire to step into the limelight as a regional energy hub, Putin agreed to attend the energy summit which President Parvanov is hosting in Sofia in Spring 2009.

[15.](#) (C) Debriefing Sarkozy on the phone as our meeting began, Stanishev repeatedly underscored the need to take a nuanced approach with Russia, clarifying the unacceptable while also driving toward the constructive. Unqualified in describing the problems in Georgia, the push into the near abroad and manipulation of energy across the board, he stressed the need to help the Russians out of the hole they are digging for themselves and us. Stanishev will be in New York for UN meetings September 24-26 and looks forward to discussions with President Bush and others on the margins. McEldowney